



Natural Heritage &
Endangered Species
Program

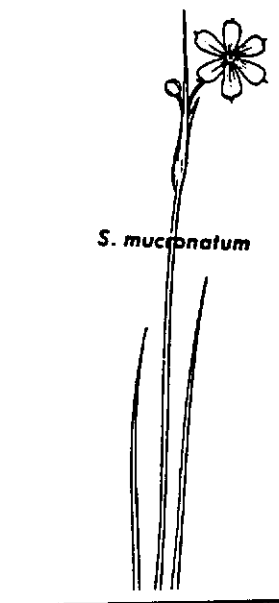
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MASSACHUSETTS THREATENED PLANTS

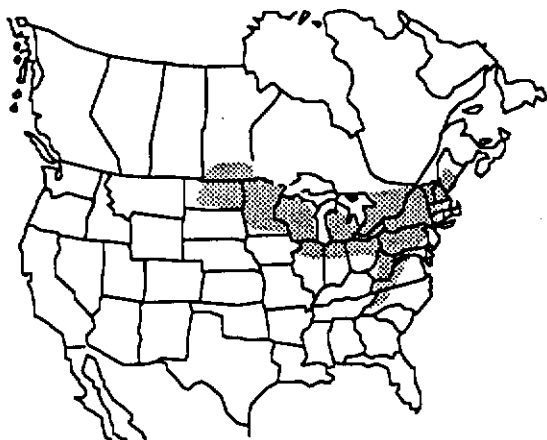
SLENDER BLUE-EYED GRASS
(*Sisyrinchium mucronatum* Michx.)

Description

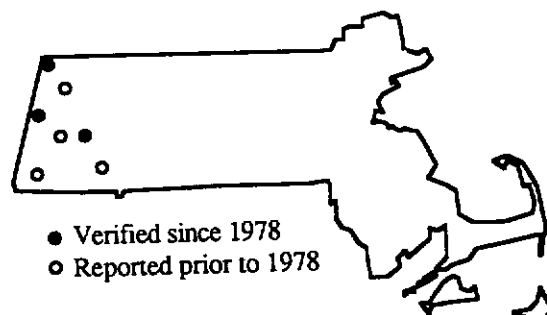
Slender Blue-eyed Grass, a member of the Iris family (Iridaceae) is a low, dark green, grass-like perennial. Its unbranched scape (naked flowering stem) is thin, wiry, narrowly winged, and 1.5-4.5 dm (2/3- 1 1/2 ft.) high. The very narrow, 1-2 mm (1/25-2/25 in.) broad leaves are much shorter than the scape. Blue to violet flowers, each with a yellow to greenish-yellow "eye", occur in a cluster at the scape's terminus. A red-purple--or, rarely, green--spathe (modified leaf sheathing an inflorescence) extends beyond the cluster of flowers. The plant's capsules (dry fruits derived from a compound pistil which contain many seeds) are globose in shape and 2-4 mm (2/25 - 4/25 in.) long. Slender Blue-eyed Grass flowers from mid-May to late June.



Peterson, R.T. A Field Guide to North American Wildflowers. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1978.



Documented Range of Slender
Blue-eyed Grass



Massachusetts Distribution by Town

Range

The documented range of *S. mucronatum* extends from Maine to southern Manitoba, and south to North Carolina and Illinois.

Similar Species

Common Blue-eyed Grass (*Sisyrinchium montanum*) is the only other in Massachusetts that normally has an unbranched scape. However, its leaves are much wider, 3-4 mm (3/25-4/25 in) wide and are a light shade of green, and its capsules are larger. Finally, the red-purple spathe of Slender Blue-eyed Grass is seldom seen in other *Sisyrinchium* species. Although not large, this genus is very conservative in its features, and it takes practice to identify the species.

Habitat in Massachusetts

Preferred habitats are moist fields, meadows, borders of fens (wet, generally open areas where cold, calcium-rich water seeps to the surface) and, occasionally, moist roadsides, especially with limey soils. Current (discovered or relocated since 1978) stations in Massachusetts include a shallow roadside ditch, a wet meadow, and an open, alkaline seepage fen (an unforested, peat-forming habitat where very cold, nutrient poor water seeps through limey gravel to the surface). Associated species may include various sedges--among them, Bush's Sedge (*Carex bushii*) and Small Yellow-sedge (*C. cryptolepis*).

Population Status

S. mucronatum is presently listed as "Threatened" in Massachusetts. There are three current (discovered or relocated since 1978) and four historical (unverified since 1978) stations in the Commonwealth, with all current sites located in Berkshire county. Threats to the species include general reforestation and loss of meadow habitats. However, reasons for the plant's rarity are unclear since there appears to be a good deal of suitable habitat in the state.